

E S S A Y

ON THE
CHARACTER,
MANNERS, AND GENIUS

OF

W O M E N

IN DIFFERENT AGES.

Enlarged from the French of M. THOMAS.

By Mr. RUSSELL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

V O L. II

PHILADELPHIA:

PRINTED AND SOLD BY R. AITKEN, BOOK-
SELLER, OPPOSITE THE LONDON-COFFEE-
HOUSE, FRONT-STREET.

M,DCC,LXXIV.

Y A S S Y

ON THE

CHALAT

MANITIS AND KENNIS

W O M E N

IN DIFFERENT AGES

Edited from the French of M. T. H. H.

By M. R. H. H.

IN TWO VOLUMES

V O L . I I

PHILADELPHIA

PRINTED AND SOLD BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT

AND OPPOSITE THE LAMAR-CORNER

MARKET STREET

1847

CONTENTS.

PART II.

SECT. V. Of the comparative Merit of
the two sexes. Page 1

SECT. VI. Of the Decline of serious
Gallantry, and of the
Progress of Society in
France. 46

SECT. VII. Of the Progress of Society
in Britain, and of the
Character, Manners, and
Talents of the British
Women. 72

SECT. VIII. Conclusion. 117

CONTENTS

PART II.

SECT. V. Of the comparative Merit of
the two Sexes.

SECT. VI. Of the Education of Ladies
Generally, and of the
Progress of Learning in
France.

SECT. VII. Of the Progress of Learning
in Great Britain, and of the
Education of Men, and
of the Progress of Learning
in France.

SECT. VIII. Conclusion.

E S S A Y
ON THE
CHARACTER, MANNERS, and GENIUS
OF
W O M E N.

P A R T II.

S E C T I O N V.

OF THE COMPARATIVE MERIT OF
THE TWO SEXES.

TO determine this grand question of self-love and rivalry between the sexes, it would be necessary to examine the strength or weakness of their organs; the education of which they are capable; the end of nature in forming them; how far it is possible to correct or to change her purpose; which would

gain, and which would lose by departing from her ; and, in short, to mark particularly the influence which the difference of duties, of occupations, and of manners, must unavoidably have on the genius, on the sentiments, and on the character of the two sexes.

In comparing the intellectual powers of the sexes, it would be necessary to consider distinctly the philosophical talent, which meditates ; the talent of memory, which collects ; the talent of imagination, which creates ; the moral and political talent, which governs.

It would further be necessary to inquire, to what degree women possess these four kinds of genius : If the natural weakness of their organs, which is the cause of their beauty ; if the inquietude of their character, which arises from their imagination ; if the multitude and the variety of their sensations, which are numbered among their charms, may not deprive them of that vigorous and continued attention which is requisite

site to connect a numerous train of ideas—an attention, which excludes all other objects, to view and contemplate one; which out of a single idea produces a multitude, all chained to the first; or which, out of a number of scattered ideas, selects one primitive and vast idea which combines all the rest.

This philosophical spirit is rare, indeed, even among men; but still there are many great men who have possessed it—who have raised themselves to the height of nature to become acquainted with her works; who have shewn to the soul the source of its ideas; who have assigned to reason its bounds, to motion its laws, and to the universe its harmony; who have created sciences in creating principles, and who have aggrandised the human mind in cultivating their own. If there is no woman found on a level with those illustrious men, is it the fault of education, or of nature?

Descartes, abused by envious men, but admired by two generous princesses,

boasted of the philosophical talents of women. I am far however from thinking that his gratitude could lead him into a voluntary error, even in compliment to beauty. He would no doubt find in Elizabeth and in Christina a docility which prided itself in listening to so great a man; and which seemed to associate itself with his genius in following the range of his ideas. He might perhaps even find in the compositions of women perspicuity, order, and method; but did he find that strong discernment, that depth of intellect, that diffidence which characterises the real philosopher? — Did he find that cool reason which, always inquisitive, advances slowly, and remeasures all its steps? — Their genius, penetrating and rapid, flies off, — and is at rest. They have more fallies than efforts. What they do not see at once, they either cannot see at all, or they disdain, or they despair to see. It is therefore little wonder they should want that unremitted assiduity, which alone can pursue and discover important truths.

Imagination

Imagination might seem rather to be their province.

It has been observed, that the imagination of women has in it something unaccountably singular and extraordinary. All things strike it; all things paint themselves on it in a lively manner. Their volatile senses embrace every object, and carry off its image. Some unknown powers, some secret sympathies enable them rapidly to seize the impressions. The material world is not sufficient for them: they love to create an ideal world of their own; which they embellish, and in which they dwell. Spectres, enchantments, prodigies—whatever transcends the ordinary laws of nature, is their creation, and their delight. They enjoy even their terrors. Their feelings are fine, and their fancy always approaches to enthusiasm.

But it would be necessary to inquire, how far that fancy, when applied to the arts, can unfold itself in the talent of creating and of painting: if their imagi-

nation is as vigorous, as it is lively and versatile ; if it does not unavoidably partake of their occupations, of their pleasures, of their tastes, and even of their weaknesses. I suspect that their delicate fibres are afraid of strong sensations, which fatigue them, and that they seek the soft, on which they may repose.

Man, always active, is exposed to storms. The imagination of the poet enjoys itself on the ridge of mountains, on the brink of volcanoes, in the middle of ruins, on seas, and on fields of battle ; and it is never more susceptible of voluptuous and tender ideas, than after having experienced some great emotion.

But women, by means of their delicate and sedentary life, less acquainted with the contrast of the gentle and the terrible, may be supposed to feel and to paint less perfectly, even the agreeable sensations, than those who, thrown into opposite conditions, pass rapidly from the one sentiment to the other. Perhaps too, from the habit of resigning themselves to the

the impression of the moment, which with them is very strong, their minds must be more replenished with images than pictures: — or perhaps their imagination, though lively, may be compared to a mirror, which reflects fairly, magnifies, multiplies, distorts, or diminishes, like their good-humour, their hopes, their fears, their jealousies, their envies, the forms of all things, but creates nothing.

Love is without dispute the passion which the women feel the strongest, and which they express the best. They feel the other passions more feebly, and by rebound: but love is their own; it is the charm and the business of their life; it is their soul. They should therefore know well how to paint it.

But do they know, like the author of Othello, of The Revenge, or of Zara, to express the transports of a troubled soul, which joins fury to love; which is sometimes impetuous, and sometimes tender; which now is softened, and now
is

is roused; which sheds blood, and which sacrifices itself? Can they paint these doublings of the human heart, these storms of emotion and passion? — No: nature herself restrains them. She has given to one of the sexes bold desires, and the right of attack; to the other she has assigned the province of defence, and timid desires, which attract by resisting. Love in the one sex is a conquest, in the other a sacrifice.

It therefore follows, that the women of all countries, and in all ages, must have known better how to paint a delicate and tender sentiment, than a violent and turbulent passion. Obligated, in short, by their duty, by the reserve of their sex, by the desire of a certain charm, which is more bewitching than wit, and more attractive than beauty, always to conceal a part of their sentiments, — must not these sentiments, by being continually constrained, become weaker by degrees, and have less energy than those of men, who, at all times, bold and extravagant with impunity, give to their passions what tone they

they please, and which are invigorated by exercise?

A temporary constraint inflames the passions; but a continued constraint cools or extinguishes them.

With regard to the talent of order and memory, which classes facts, and ideas when necessary, as it depends a good deal upon method and habit, there seems little reason why the two sexes may not possess it in an equal degree. Yet it would still be necessary to examine, if the women would not be deficient in the quantity of materials, which are so essential to erudition; if excessive application would not more easily disgust them. Is it not true, that their impatience and natural desire of change, which arise from fleeting and rapid impressions, prevent them from following for a course of years the same kind of study, and consequently from acquiring profound or extensive knowledge? We are sensible they have qualities of mind which atone for it. It is not the same hand which polishes

polishes the diamond, and which digs the mine.

We come now to a more important object, the moral and political talent; which consists in the regulating of ourselves and of others. To compare the advantages and disadvantages of the two sexes with regard to this object, it would be necessary to observe the same talent in society, and when applied to government.

The women in society, by being continually upon the look-out, from the double motive of curiosity and of policy, must have a perfect knowledge of men. They must be able to disentangle all the folds of self-love; to discover the secret weaknesses, the false modesties, and the false grandeurs; what a man is, and what he would be; the qualities which he shews, even by an effort to conceal them; his esteem marked even in his satires, and by his satires themselves. They must know and distinguish characters:—the cool pride, which enjoys
itself

itself in state ; the warm and impetuous pride, which is easily inflamed ; the vain sensibility, the tender sensibility, the sensibility which is veiled under an appearance of indifference ; the pretended levity, and the levity of the heart ; the diffidence which proceeds from character, from vice, from misfortune, or from the mind ; in short, all the sentiments, and all their shades.

As women set a high value on opinion, they must reflect much upon what can produce it, destroy it, or confirm it. They must know how far one may direct, without appearing to be interested ; how far one may presume upon that art, even after it is known ; in what estimation they are held by those with whom they live, and to what degree it is necessary to serve them that they may govern them.

In all matters of business women know the great effects which are produced by little causes. They have the art of imposing upon some, by seeming to discover

to them what they already know; of diverting others from their purpose, by confirming their most distant suspicions. They know how to captivate by praises, those who merit them; and to raise a blush, by bestowing them where they are not due.

These delicate sciences are the leading-strings in which the women conduct the men. Society to them is like a harpichord, of which they know the touches: they can divine the sound which every one will produce. But the men, bold and free, supplying address by force, consequently having less call for observation, and hurried along besides by the continual necessity of acting, can scarcely be possessed of that crowd of little notices and polite attentions, which are every moment necessary in the commerce of life: their calculations therefore on society must be more flow, and less sure, than those of women.

It would afterwards be necessary to compare the genius of the two sexes, as applied to government.

In

In society men are governed by their passions, and the least motives often produce the greatest consequences. But, in the government of states, it is by comprehensive views, by the choice of principles, and, above all, by the discovery and the employment of talents, that success can be obtained. Here, instead of taking advantage of foibles, we must fear them; we must raise men above their weaknesses, not lead them into them.

The art of governing in society may therefore be said to consist in flattering vice and folly with address; and the art of administration, in combating them with judgment. The knowledge of mankind required in the two cases is very different: In the one, they must be known by their weakness; in the other, by their strength. The one takes part with failings, for little ends; the other discovers great qualities, which are mingled with those very faults. The one, in short, seeks little blemishes in great men, and the other, in dissecting great men, must often

perceive the same spots: for perfect characters exist only in Utopia.

Let us now examine, if this kind of genius and observation agrees equally with the character of the two sexes. I know that there are women who have reigned, and who still reign with lustre. Christina in Sweden, Isabella of Castile in Spain, and Elizabeth in England, have merited the esteem of their age, and of posterity. We saw, in the war of 1741, a princess, whom even her enemies admired, defend the German empire with no less genius than courage; and we behold, at this day, the Ottoman empire shaken by a woman. But, in general questions, we should beware of taking exceptions for rules; we ought to attend only to the ordinary course of nature.

It therefore becomes necessary to inquire, if in society the women being less engaged in action, and in general less fit for it, can know so well as the other sex, the talents of men, their use, or their extent;

extent; if great views, and the application of great principles, including the habit of seizing at a glance the result of things, correspond not ill with the proximity of their imagination, or at least with the arrangement of their ideas. It is character chiefly which governs; it is the vigour of the soul which gives impulse to genius, which strengthens and extends political capacity. But this character is seldom formed but by great commotions, by great hopes, by great fears, and by the necessity of being continually engaged in action. Is not then the character of women in general, better calculated for elegance than for sway?—for attraction than for command?—Does not their rapid imagination, which often makes sentiment precede thought, render them more susceptible of prejudice or of error in the choice of men?—Would not one be in danger of abuse, would not one even run the risk of their displeasure, if he should say, that in the distribution of their esteem they would set too high a value upon external accomplishments; and, in short, that they would

perhaps be too easily led to believe, that an agreeable man was a great man? —

Yet Elizabeth was not free from this censure. The inclinations of her sex stole beneath the cares of the throne, and the grandeur of her character. We are chagrined at certain times, to see the little weaknesses of a woman mingle with the views of a great mind. If Mary queen of Scotland had been less fair, perhaps her rival had been less cruel. This taste for coquetry, as is well known, furnished Elizabeth with favourites; in the choice of which she judged more like a woman than a sovereign. She was always too ready to believe, that the power of pleasing her implied genius.

That so much celebrated queen exercised over England an almost arbitrary sway; at which perhaps we ought not to be surpris'd. Women in general on the throne are more inclined to despotism, and more impatient of restraint than men. The sex to whom nature has assigned power by giving them strength, have a
certain

certain confidence which raises them in their own eyes; so that they have no need of manifesting to themselves that superiority of which they are sure. But weakness, astonished at the sway which she possesses, shakes her sceptre on every side, to establish her dominion.

Great men are perhaps more carried to that species of despotism which arises from lofty ideas; and women, above the ordinary class, to the despotism which proceeds from passion. The last is rather a folly of the heart, than the effect of system.

One thing which favours the despotism of female sovereigns is, that the men confound the empire of their sex with that of their rank. What we refuse to grandeur, we pay to beauty. But the dominion of women, even when arbitrary, is seldom cruel. Theirs is rather a despotism of caprice, than of oppression. The throne itself cannot cure their

sensibility; they carry in their bosoms the counterpoise of their power*.

If, after having compared the talents of the two sexes, we should compare their virtues, we would receive very different informations.

Both experience and history attest, that in all sects, in all countries, and in all ranks, the women have more religious virtues than the men. Naturally possessed of more sensibility, they have more need of an object that may unceasingly occupy their souls; they offer to God a sentiment which they cannot contain, and which otherwise would be a crime. Greedy of happiness, and not finding enough in this world, they launch into a life and a world abounding with ineffable delights. Extreme in their desires, nothing limited can satisfy them.—More

* Hence it follows, that in limited monarchies female sovereigns will tend to despotism from their jealousy; and, in absolute governments, will approach to monarchy by their mildness. This observation is proved by experience.

flexible

flexible in their duties than men, they reason less, and feel more. More subjected to good opinion, they pay more attention to what concerns themselves. Less occupied, and less active, they have more time for contemplation. Less abstracted or absent, they are more strongly affected by the same idea, because they see it continually. More struck by external objects, they relish more the pageantry of ceremonies and of temples; and the devotion of the senses has no inconsiderable effect on that of the soul. Confined, in short, on all hands; denied the effusion of their sentiments to men by the reserve of their sex, to women by an eternal rivalry, they may at least talk of their pleasures and their pains to the great Being who knows them, and they often pour into his bosom many dear weaknesses of which the world are ignorant. In so doing they recall their beloved errors, they enjoy even their sorrow, without reproaching themselves; and afflicted, yet free from remorse, because under the eye of a benevolent Deity, they find

find secret delights in repenting, and in combating their warmest wishes.

It should seem therefore, in consequence of the character of women, that their religion must be more tender, and that of men more severe, the one consisting more in practice, the other in principles; and, in exalting their religious ideas, that the woman is more liable to superstition, the man to fanaticism. But, if once fanaticism catch hold of the woman, her more lively imagination will carry her a greater length; and, more austere even from the dread of sensibility, what was formerly a part of her charms, will only contribute to increase her fury.

The domestic virtues are intimately connected with those of religion. They are doubtless common to both sexes: but the advantage seems still to be in favour of the women. At least they have more need of virtues which they have more occasion to practice.

In

In the first period of life, timid, and without support, the girl is more attached to her mother : by seldom leaving her, she comes to love her more. The trembling innocent is cheered by the presence of her protectress; and her weakness, while it heightens her beauty, augments her sensibility. Become mother, she has other duties, which all things invite her to fulfil. Then the condition of the two sexes is widely different.

Man, in the middle of his labours, and among his arts, employing his powers, and commanding nature, finds a pleasure in his industry, in his success, and even in his toils. But woman, more solitary, and less active, has fewer resources : her pleasures must arise from her virtues ; her amusements are her family. It is by the cradle of her child — it is in viewing the smiles of her daughter, or the sports of her son, that a mother is happy.

And where are the bowels, the cries, the powerful emotions of nature ? — Where is the sentiment, at once sublime and

and pathetic, that carries every feeling to excess? — is it to be found in the frosty indifference, and the sour severity of so many fathers? — No; but in the warm and passionate bosom of a mother. It is she, who by an impulse, as quick as involuntary, rushes into the flood to preserve a boy, whose imprudence had betrayed him to the waves. It is she, who, in the middle of a conflagration, throws herself across the flames to save a sleeping infant. It is she, who with dishevelled locks, pale, distracted, embraces with transport the body of a dead child, pressing its cold lips to hers, as if she would reanimate by her tears and her caresses the insensible clay.

These great expressions of nature, these heart-rending emotions, which fill us at once with wonder, compassion, and terror, always have belonged, and always will belong, only to women. They possess in those moments an inexpressible something, which carries them beyond themselves; they seem to discover to

us new souls, above the standard of humanity.

If we consider even the matrimonial duties, the obligations of husband and wife; which of the two sexes is most likely to be faithful? — which, in violating them, has most obstacles to encounter? — Is not woman best defended by her education, by her reserve, by that modesty which silences even her desires, and sometimes disputes the rights of the most tender love? — To these restraints we may add, the power of the first passion and the first ties over a heart endowed with sensibility, and which had formerly been forbid to love; the force of opinion, which reigns so despotically over the women, and which, tyrant-like, applauds often the same weaknesses in the one sex, for which it devotes the other to infamy.

Nature herself, attentive in this instance to the manners of women, has taken care to surround them with the strongest, yet the gentlest barriers. She has

has made inconstancy more painful, and fidelity more pleasing to their hearts:— and it must be owned, that they have seldom begun the disorders of families. Even in ages of general corruption, conjugal infidelity in women has been one of the last of crimes.

After the religious and domestic virtues come the social virtues; and first the virtues of sensibility, or the sweet and affectionate passions. The chief of these are friendship and love.

It has long been a question, which of the two sexes is most capable of friendship. Montaigne, who is so much celebrated for his knowledge of human nature, has given it positively against the women; and his opinion has been generally embraced: but he appears to have judged too hastily on this subject. Through his whole Essays, indeed, he has done too little justice to the gentle sex. Perhaps— for we cannot accuse him of insensibility—he was like that judge

judge who, conscious of his own weakness, was so much afraid of being partial, that he decided every cause against his friends.

If I were to converse with Montaigne on this subject, I would say to him,

‘ You undoubtedly agree, that friendship is the sentiment of two souls, which seek and which have need of the support of each other. Now it should seem, that the sex whose head and hands are most occupied ; which is most independent ; which is most free ; which has the greatest ability of expanding its ideas, and of employing its sentiments ; which in prosperity is better supported by pride ; which in adversity is more humbled than afflicted ; which in all conditions has a consciousness of its powers, and which glories in them— it should seem, that man could more easily dispense with the commerce, and the sweet effusions of friendship. But woman, delicate and feeble, and on that account having

‘ more need of support ; in herself more
 ‘ subject to chagrin, to private griefs,
 ‘ and to that sorrow of heart which
 ‘ finds more relief in sensibility than
 ‘ pride ; in the world, obliged almost
 ‘ always to play a part, and to carry
 ‘ along with her a load of sensations and
 ‘ of ideas, which she hides, and which
 ‘ oppresses her—woman, in short, to
 ‘ whom externals are nothing, and her
 ‘ feelings every thing ; woman, in whom
 ‘ every thing produces a sentiment, to
 ‘ whom indifference is violence, and who
 ‘ knows almost only to love and to hate,
 ‘ must feel more exquisitely the liberty
 ‘ and the pleasure of a secret commerce,
 ‘ and the tender confidence which
 ‘ friendship gives and receives.”

Montaigne would not fail to reply,

‘ You judge of women according to
 ‘ nature ; judge of them likewise ac-
 ‘ cording to society, as they exist in the
 ‘ world, and particularly in great cities.
 ‘ Examine if their general desire to
 ‘ please, a sentiment more slight than
 ‘ deep,

' deep, and more vain than tender, has
 ' not withered their hearts, and in a
 ' great measure blasted sensibility itself;
 ' if, intoxicated with eternal flattery, and
 ' accustomed to the sweetest dominion,
 ' they could submit to continual sacri-
 ' fices, and to that happy equality which
 ' friendship imposes; if, in short, in
 ' their friendship with us, they would
 ' not have too much reserve:— and how
 ' contemptible is a friendship which is
 ' on its guard, where the sentiments are
 ' always covered with a slender veil, and
 ' where the naked heart is never seen!

' I speak not of their friendship be-
 tween themselves: there was no such
 ' thing known in my time; and, I sup-
 ' pose it is the same in yours. But I
 ' should be glad to know how they can
 ' love, or repose confidence in each
 ' other, in a world where they are con-
 ' tinually compared, and are continually
 ' comparing themselves; where their at-
 ' tachments divide them; where their
 ' pretensions interfere; where they are
 ' rivals in rank, in beauty, in fortune,

' in wit, in their talent for society, and
 ' in their societies themselves: for self-
 ' love always calculating, always mea-
 ' suring, views all things, is offended
 ' at all things, and is fostered even by
 ' what offends it.

' No!"——Montaigne might add,
 ' Friendship does not consist in empty
 ' show, in jargon, in vain phrases, more
 ' ridiculous even in their motive than
 ' their meaning. It is a sentiment which
 ' requires energy of soul, and a soli-
 ' dity of mind as well as of character;
 ' it is a sacred and almost a holy union,
 ' which by a devotion peculiar to itself,
 ' consecrates a heart entirely to a heart;
 ' it is a passion which transforms two
 ' wills into one, and gives to two beings
 ' the same life and the same soul.

' Friendship is bold and severe: for,
 ' properly to fulfil its duties, it must be
 ' able to speak and to hear the harsh and
 ' ungrateful language of truth. It must
 ' possess a courage, which is neither
 ' alarmed at sacrifices nor at dangers:
 ' and

and it demands, above all things, that unity of character which, from the variety and the eternal fluctuation of their passions, we seldom find in women, and which only can enable us to feel, to think, and to act as a friend, at all times, and upon all occasions.

What do I say?—Are not friends more strongly associated by great interests, and by great trials?—But women, by their condition, are destined to repose. Nature has formed them, like the flowers, to bloom sweetly on the parterre which gives them birth; but the trees, produced and reared in the middle of storms, and in more danger, even from their strength, of being broken by the winds, have more need of support from each other, and they are sustained by union.”

From these objections, it may perhaps follow, that friendship in women must be more rare than among men; but it will also be allowed at the same time, that it must be more delicate and more

tender. Men have in general more of the parade than the elegance of friendship. They often wound while they serve; and their warmest sentiments are not sufficiently illuminated with those little attentions which are of so much value in the intercourse of souls. But women have a sensibility which is never absent, which never forgets or omits any thing. Nothing escapes them: they divine the hidden friendship; they encourage the bashful or timid friendship, and they offer their sweetest consolations to friendship in distress. Furnished with finer instruments, they treat more delicately a wounded heart; they compose it, and prevent it from feeling its agonies: and they know, above all things, to give an importance to circumstances which have none in themselves. We ought therefore perhaps to desire the friendship of a man upon great occasions; but, for general happiness, we must prefer the friendship of a woman.

Women in love have the same delicacies and the same weaknesses. Their
passions

passions are keen : they either love at once, or do not love at all. Men are less easily inflamed, and by degrees. The passions of women, by being more constrained, are perhaps more ardent : they are nursed by silence, and roused by opposition. Fear and modesty mingle inquietude with love in their gentle hearts, and by exercising it, double its force.— When a man is sure of his conquest, his passion is tinged with pride ; but a woman is then only more tender. The more her confession has cost her, the more dearly she loves the man to whom it was made. She attaches herself by her sacrifices. Virtuous, she enjoys her denials ; guilty, she glories in the favours she bestows.

Women therefore, when love is a passion, are more constant than men ; but, when it is only an appetite, they are more libertine. For then they feel no more those anxieties, those struggles, and that sweet shame, which impressed the delicious sentiment so strongly on their hearts. Nothing remains but the
senses

senses and imagination :— senses guided by caprice ; an imagination wasted by its own ardour, and which is every moment inflamed and extinguished.

After love and friendship come benevolence, and that generous compassion which interests the heart in the misfortunes of others. These are more particularly the portion of women. Every thing inclines them to generosity and pity. Their delicate senses revolt at the presence of distress and pain. Objects of misery and aversion discompose the soft indolence of their minds. Their souls are more hurt by images of sorrow and of spleen than tormented by their own sensibility. They must therefore be very anxious to afford relief.— They possess besides in a high degree, that instinctive feeling, which operates without reasoning ; and they often relieve, while men deliberate. Their benevolence is perhaps less rational, but it is more active. It is also more attentive, and more tender. What woman has ever been wanting in commiseration to the unfortunate ?

But

But it would be necessary to examine if women, so susceptible of friendship, of love, of piety, of benevolence to individuals, can elevate themselves to that patriotism, or disinterested love of one's country, which embraces all its citizens, and to that philanthropy, or universal love of mankind, which embraces all nations.

I would not be thought to undervalue patriotism. It is the noblest sentiment of the human mind ; at least it is that which has produced the greatest men, and which gave birth to those ancient heroes, whose history still astonishes our imagination, and accuses our weakness. But if we should trace its source, and examine in what it consists, we would find that this boasted virtue is almost always a composition of pride and selfishness, generated by the ideas of interest and property, by the remembrance of past services, by the hope of future honours or rewards, and a certain factitious enthusiasm which robs men of themselves, to
transform

transform their existence entirely into the body of the state.

These sentiments, it will readily be perceived, do not correspond with the condition of women. In almost all governments, excluded from honours, and from offices, they can neither obtain, nor hope to obtain, nor attach themselves to the state, from the pride of having held a place of eminence. Possessed of little property, and restrained by the laws even in what they have, the form of legislation in all countries must make them in a great measure indifferent to public welfare. Never acting or fighting for their country, they have not one flattering remembrance to tie them to it, by vanity, by labours, or by virtues. Existing, in short, more in themselves, and in the objects of their sensibility, and being perhaps less fitted than men by nature for the civil institutions in which they have less share, they must be less susceptible of that enthusiasm, which makes a man prefer the state to his family,

mily, and the collective body of his fellow-citizens to himself.

The example of the women of Rome and Sparta, I am sensible, may be urged in objection to these observations; but those ancient republics are not to be compared with our modern establishments. The wonders performed by the Dutch women, in the revolution of the Seven Provinces, will likewise perhaps be urged. To which I answer, that the glorious enthusiasm of liberty can do all things; that there are times when nature is astonished at herself; and that great virtues spring from great calamities. But of such there is no reasoning.

If the love of their country is little suited to women, that universal love of mankind, which extends to all nations, and to all ages, and which is a kind of abstract sentiment, seems to correspond still less with their character. They must have an image of what they love. It is only by the power of arranging his ideas, that the philosopher is able to overleap
so

so many barriers; to pass from a man, to a people; from a people, to human kind; from the time in which he lives, to ages yet unborn; and from what he sees, to what he does not see.

The tender sex do not love to send their souls so far a-wandering. They assemble their sentiments and their ideas about them, and confine their affections to what interests them most. Those strides of benevolence to women are out of nature. A man to them, is more than a nation; and the hour in which they live, than a thousand ages after death.

There are certain qualities, which have generally been ranked among the social virtues, but which may more properly be called THE VIRTUES OF POLISHED LIFE. They are the charm and the bond of company; and are useful at all times and upon all occasions. They are in the commerce of the world, what current money is in trade: they are sometimes not absolutely necessary, but

one

one can never safely be without them; and they always procure the possessor a more favourable reception. Such is that mild complacency, which gives a softness to the character, and an attractive sweetness to the manners; that indulgence, which pardons the faults of others, even when it has no need of pardon itself; the art of not seeing the weaknesses which discover themselves, and of keeping the secret of those who hide it; of concealing our advantages, when we humble our rivals or opponents; of dealing gently with those, who cannot submit without being offended: that facility, which adopts ideas which it never had; that delicate foresight, which divines the fears of those with whom we converse, and encourages the display of thought and sentiment; that freedom, which inspires confidence; and all that politeness, in short, which perhaps is not virtue,—nay, which is sometimes no more than a happy lie,—but which gives laws to self-love, and makes pride fit easy by the side of pride, which would otherwise every moment be wounded.

We shall not trace the parallel of the sexes through all these sentiments ; but it is necessary to observe in general, that the women correct that rudeness which pride and passion introduce into the company of men. Their delicate hand smooths the asperities of human life. Politeness is a part of their character ; it is connected with their mind, with their manners. and even with their interest. To the most virtuous woman society is a field of conquest.

Few men have formed the project of making every body happy, and so much the worse for those who have : but many women have not only formed such a scheme, but have succeeded in it. The more general the intercourse of the sexes, the more the talent of pleasing is perfected ; the more general this species of merit ; for then there are more little interests to conciliate, and characters to unite. Society becomes a complicated machine, and demands more dexterity to regulate its movements,

We

* We are, in general, so much the more polite, as we are less devoted to ourselves and more to others; as we are more attentive to opinion; as we are more zealous to be distinguished; and, perhaps, in proportion as we have fewer resources and great means of being so. But these are not all: among individuals and among a people, between the sexes and between the ranks, politeness supposes a certain degree of idleness; for it supposes the habit and the necessity of living together. Hence the art of regulating our behaviour, of adjusting our looks, our words, and our motions; the need of attentions, and all the little gratifications of vanity. We are naturally inclined to pay that homage which we receive, and to exact that which we pay. Thus the delicacy of self-love produces all the refinements in society; as the delicacy of the senses produces all the refinements in pleasure; and as the delicacy of taste, which is perhaps only the result of the other two, produces all the refinements in literature, arts, and sciences.—It will be easy to discern how

these objects are connected with one another, and how they are all related to women.

But refined politeness, it may be said, is allied to falsehood. It substitutes the expression of sentiment too often for sentiment itself. Hence the reproach so common against women :— and it must be owned, that they are by nature more disposed to every kind of dissimulation than men. Power and independance display all their motions with freedom; but weakness and the art of pleasing, must observe and measure all theirs. The timid sex therefore learn to hide the sentiments which they have, and exhibit those which they have not.

A man may be open without being on that account entitled to praise; for he is often so without effort, nay from an impetuosity of soul which he cannot refrain; but sincerity in a woman, when real, is never without merit. Men are sometimes frank by design: women seldom affect that species of hypocrisy; and
when

when they do, to please the better, they give to their frankness the air of confidence. It is a sacrifice which they make to friendship.

Men owe their frankness to pride, women to address. The one sex often utters a truth without any other view than truth itself; in the mouth of the other, even truth itself has an aim. The falsity of man almost always regards his interest; it is only for himself: that of woman generally proceeds from a desire to please; she refers every thing to others. The one cheats, the other seduces you.

Flattery is common to both sexes. But the flattery of men is often gross to a degree that is base: that of women is more light, and has more the appearance of sentiment. Even when it is overdone, it is generally amusing, and is never disgusting. The motive and the manner save them from contempt.

To conclude this parallel, (which is already too long) it would be necessary still to examine the rigid virtues of the two sexes which are connected with justice, and the bold and nervous qualities which are allied to courage.

But almost all the distinctions, which can be made on these subjects, proceed upon the same principles. Thus, for instance, in regard to equity, whence arise the duties of a severe and impartial justice; if there is one of the sexes which almost always feels before it judges, and which is led by an imagination, that gives it aversions or likings for which it cannot account; whose caprices an uniform and inflexible rule would fatigue; and whose decisions have at all times been more governed by particular ideas, than by general views: it must be owned, that such a character agrees ill with that rigid equity which pays less regard to circumstances than to facts, and to persons than to things. Hence women rarely resemble the law, which pronounces without

out love or hate. Their justice has always some head-mark, to distinguish those whom it condemns or absolves. Consult the annals of history, and you will find them generally bordering on excess of pity, or excess of vengeance. They want that cool deliberation which knows where to stop: to them moderation is torment.

A woman of some genius has said *, that the French seem to have escaped from the hands of nature, since they have nothing in their composition but air and fire. She might have said as much of her sex; but she, no doubt, was unwilling to betray her secret.

It might seem bold, to presume to determine how far the two sexes are by nature susceptible of courage. But the word Courage is so vague, that to give it any determinate idea, we must distinguish that virtue into its different species.

* Madame de Grassini, *Lettres Peruviennes*.

The distinction of mental and animal courage, is well known: but these two kinds subdivide themselves again. In the courage of mind, for example, we find a courage of principle, which defies opinion; a courage of will, which gives energy to the soul, and spurns constraint; a courage of constancy, which supports the idea of toil, and toil itself; a calm courage, which, in the most delicate circumstances, views all things deliberately. In the animal courage, in like manner, we find a courage against pain, which knows how to suffer; a courage against danger, whether it consists of that hardiness which encounters, or that firmness which keeps its post; an habitual courage, which is always the same, and which discovers itself at all times, and upon all occasions; and that enthusiastic courage, which is a kind of fine fever of the soul, which rages and ceases by fits, and which meets with intrepidity at one time, what it would shrink from at another.

It would not be necessary to make a particular application of these details; the reader's own reflections will be sufficient. We ought, however, to observe, that the courage which the women possess in the highest degree, is that of supporting pain; which is no doubt owing to the variety of ills to which they are subjected by nature. But whatever it proceeds from, the fact is certain: they would sooner suffer than displease, and would a thousand times rather endure pain than reproach.

We have likewise seen women demonstrate an extraordinary courage in danger; but it is always owing to some strong passion, or great idea, which rouses their minds, and elevates them above themselves. Then their inflamed imagination gives a new direction to the imagination of their sex; and their ardent sensibility, tending to one object, attracts the little sensibilities of character, which are the sources of fear and of weakness. Under such agitations they possess a courage which nothing can withstand,

withstand, and which in effort exceeds even habitual valour; which, by reason of its experience, has less impetuosity, as it borders less upon extravagance.

These are some of the subjects which should be discussed and compared, in settling the dispute of the Equality, or Superiority of the Sexes. To treat the question properly, it would be necessary to be at the same time a physician, an anatomist, and a philosopher; to be equally rational and sentimental; and, above all these singular attainments, one must have the misfortune to be perfectly disinterested.

SECTION VI.

Of the Decline of serious Gallantry,
and of the Progress of Society in
FRANCE.

THE sixteenth century, in which the dispute of the superiority of the sexes was so much agitated, appears to have been the most brilliant era in the annals

annals of women. After that period we find fewer champions, either literary or warlike, enlisted under their banners: The enthusiasm of serious gallantry was somewhat abated. The entire extinction of chivalry in Europe; the abolition of tournaments; the religious wars in Germany, and in France, which drew the women of rank to court; and the manners which necessarily flow from idleness, from intrigue, and from beauty being regarded as an instrument of fortune — in short the new taste of society which began universally to prevail, a taste which polished the manners in corrupting them, and which, by mingling the sexes advantageously, taught them to seek one another more, but esteem one another less; — all contributed to diminish a sentiment, which, to gather strength, stands in need of obstacles, and of a certain state of the soul in which it is honoured by its desires, and respected even from its weakness.

The progress of this revolution, however, was for some time slow in France.

Under

Under Francis I. who gave the signal of corruption, we find still in the affairs of love a jealousy, a revenge, a hate, and crimes which prove the manners.

Under Catherine of Medicis, love was a mixture of gallantry and fury. The Italian ardour mingled itself with the French voluptuousness. All was intrigue. They talked of carnage in the rendezvous of beauty, and meditated in dancing the ruin of nations. In the mean time, the attention to policy and war, the factions, the parties, and a romantic something which still remained, gave an energy to the soul, which discovered itself even in the sentiments which the women inspired.

The reign of Henry IV. displayed a milder gallantry. That prince joined the courteous manners of a knight, to the weaknesses of a great king. It was thought an honour to imitate him; and his courtiers, bold and brilliant, accustomed to glory and to conquest, carried into love a species of that noble courage which

which they had displayed in the combats of war. They were corrupted, but not debased.

Under Lewis XIII. genius, which began to unfold itself, mingled metaphysics with gallantry. Every body knows the famous thesis which Cardinal Richlieu caused to be supported on love. That ludicrous injunction, which some may suppose was given in jest, and intended as a burlesque on the misapplication of learning and talents, was no more than a serious expression of the manners of those times in France. The religious contests had brought controversy into fashion. The infant taste in letters made them take the scholastic forms for science. A false wit sprung from a desire of being witty, and the inability to be so. The gallantry, which mingled itself with all things, and which disturbed nothing, because it was not deep—the gallantry, which was rather a twist of the fancy than a sentiment of the heart, adopted the whole mass of absurdities, and formed a jargon equally mystical, metaphysical,

and romantic. There was nothing written or talked of, but dissertations upon the delicacies and the sacrifices of love.

Though we generally descant little upon what we feel much, yet these conversations and reasonings discovered a turn of mind, which, in permitting gallantry, connected it with tenderness, and which always joined to the idea of woman the ideas of sensibility and respect.

The regency of Anne of Austria, and the war of the minority, formed a singular era. France was a scene of anarchy: but the taste of the times mingled pleasure with battles, and ballads with factions. All things then were conducted by women. They had in that period all the restless agitation which is communicated by the spirit of party; a spirit which is less foreign to their character than is commonly supposed. Some produced the shock, others received it. Every one according to her interest and her views caballed, wrote, and conspired. Their assemblies were at midnight. A woman

woman in a bed, or on a sofa, was the soul of the council. There she determined to negotiate, to fight, to embroil or accommodate matters with the court.

Love presided at all their consultations. They conspired to ruin a lover in the affections of his mistress, and a mistress in the favour of her lover, with as much solemnity as to lay waste a city, or assassinate a prince ; and not without reason : for a revolution in love almost always announced a revolution in politics,

Each woman had her department, and her dominion. Madame de Montbazon, fair and shewy, governed the duke of Beaufort ; Madame de Longueville, the duke of Rochefoucault ; Madame de Chatillon, Namours and Conde ; Mademoiselle de Chevreuse, the Coadjutor ; Mademoiselle de Saujon, devout and tender, the duke of Orleans ; and the duchess of Bouillon, her husband.---In the mean time Madame de Chevreuse, lively and warm, resigned herself to her lovers from taste, and to politics occasion-
ally

ally ; and the Princess Palatine, in turns the friend and the enemy of the great Conde, by means of her genius more than by her beauty, subjected all whom she desired to please, and whom she had either a whim or an interest to persuade. She possessed at once a passionate heart and a sound head ; and she was no less romantic in love, than politic in the affairs of the state.

Women often appeared publicly at the head of factions, in camps, and in councils of war. Then, to the ornaments of equipage and dress, they joined the ensigns of their party. At such a sight one must have supposed himself transported to the regions of romance, or carried back to the times of ancient chivalry. On the field, and in the fortress, instruments of music were mingled with instruments of war ; curiasses with violins ; lutes with spears ; and the polished features of beauty bloomed by the side of the war-worn soldier.

Devotion, among the women, blended
itself

itself with the spirit of faction, as the spirit of faction did with gallantry. They plotted one hour and prayed the next. So many women of rank never became Carmelites, as at this time. It seemed as if the soul, roused by violent commotions, applied itself to all things with greater impetuosity; and that imagination, inflamed by so much exercise, rushed with equal rapidity to war, to love, to religion, and to rebellion.

The spirit of gallantry, during the regency, had nearly the same character, and the same symptoms, as under Louis XIII. except that the civil war, and that extravagance which great commotions give to the soul, warmed the little tincture of chivalry which still remained in the cup of love.

Anne of Austria had brought to the court of France, a part of the manners of her country. It was a mixture of coquetry and pride, of sensibility and reserve; that is to say, a remnant of the ancient and shining gallantry of the

Moors, joined to the pomp and the stateliness of the Castilians. Then dances, romances, plays, intrigues, all were Spanish. Disguises and nocturnal scenes became the fashion : but the French vivacity substituted the violin in place of the languishing guitar. That polite and loyal people, affected passions which they had not, and counted it an honour publicly to gibbet those which they had. A sacred homage to beauty, was numbered among the duties of men. Every thing that related to women was viewed with an eye of importance : the most inconsiderable trifles had a value ; and a present of a bracelet, or a complimentary card, made an event in life. They talked as seriously of an affair of gallantry, as of the progress of a negociation, or the issue of a battle*.

It

* The verses of the duke of Rochefoucault to Madame de Longueville, are well known.

Pour mériter son cœur, pour plaire à ses beaux yeux,
J'ai fait la guerre aux rois, je l'aurois faite aux dieux.

" To merit that heart, and to please those bright eyes,

" I warr'd against kings, I'd make war 'gainst the skies.

The duke de Bellegarde, who declared himself the sublime lover of the queen, in taking leave of her majesty

to

It was this spirit which formed the character of the first romances of the age of Lewis XIV : — eternal romances, because the writers supposed that all passion must be durable ; serious, because they considered love as an important concern in life ; full of adventures, because they imagined it must turn the brain ; full of conversations, because they made it a science, which had its principles and forms ; heroic, above all things, because it must throw the greatest men at the feet of the women, and because they then believed that true passion is inseparable from honour, and will elevate itself to its object, in place of seeking to debase it.

It was that spirit likewise which formed the French theatre ; and which made the great Corneille himself blend love with the interest of states, with massacre, conspiracy, and parricide.

It
to take upon him the command of an army, begged, as a particular favour, that she would condescend to touch the hilt of his sword ; — and, during the civil war. M. de Chatillon, enamoured of Mademoiselle de Guerchi, wore one of her garters tied round his arm in a battle.

It was the same general spirit perhaps, which, reigning during the infancy of Lewis XIV. obtained to that monarch among the women the character of being at once great and tender; by which, when young, and passionately in love, he would have placed one of his subjects upon the throne, and was afterwards able to conquer his weakness; by which he conceived a passion, not less warm, for Henrietta of England, yet curbed its violence; by which, always a king, though always a lover, he from his youth knew to preserve dignity in his pleasures. But, though he covered sensuality with decency, the manners of the women, by a concurrence of circumstances, must have been much altered under his reign.

Hitherto the vices of the court had not been those of the nation. The different orders of the state were more separated. The nobility still retained a remnant of that feudal grandeur, which had made them at once, the formidable rivals of the prince, and the imperious tyrants of the people. The greater their power,
the

the greater the distinction of ranks. Family pride kept even wealth at a distance. Vanity had not yet given the signal of union. The crown, no longer jealous, removed its barriers; but the nobility multiplied theirs, to separate themselves more completely from those who might have the insolence to pretend to equality.

In those times, licentiousness and freedom of manners were almost always regarded as the privilege of rank. The vices of the great were even a part of the oppression of the common people: we are seldom inclined to imitate those whom we hate. The manners of the court therefore could only be communicated to the chief magistrates, and to the rich. But the magistrates were secure in their austerity: living in the study, and in the exercise of justice, they astonished the court, and disdained its vices. With regard to the people of wealth, few were really wealthy; the shameful, or the recent acquisition of certain fortunes, did not permit the familiarity of pride with those who were; and luxury, which only
can

can place the rich on a level with the great, was by no means general. The nobility had not yet need of trading with their names ; and the traders had still less thought of purchasing titles.

As people of business and commerce were then much occupied in their respective employments, they had little time to lose ; and, consequently, little knowledge of society. The manners of all who did not belong to the court were very unpolished ; and that species of ancient rusticity was the greater bar to coalition, because it was an object of ridicule among the courtiers. The contrast of behaviour marked the limits of pride : the line was too strongly drawn to be mistaken ; and neither party was willing to cross it.

Between the capital and the provinces there were not fewer barriers than between the ranks in life. The insecurity of travelling, the scarcity of great roads, of carriages ; and, above all, the absence of luxury and factitious wants ; and, of course, the absence in a great measure

measure of that restless dissipation which hurries the present inhabitants from place to place, and which makes them run in crowds to the capital in quest of gold, of slavery, and of vice ; by retaining every one under the roof of his fathers, contributed to preserve the manners of the nation.

But, under Lewis XIV. all things changed. The people of the court, having only titles without power, and being reduced from a real to an imaginary grandeur, mingled more freely in general society, and with the people of the city. The inequality of fortunes increased with the inequality of taxes. More value was set upon wealth. The great had more wants, the rich had more state ; the poor, corrupted by their desires, had less virtue : all ranks approximated.

The magnificence and luxury of the prince fostered these ideas. His courtiers, involved in debt by their loyalty, and ruined by their pride, soon came to caress those whom they despised. To preserve
their

their titles, it was necessary to share them with families of inferior condition. Gold, extorted from the poor, became the mediator between the rich and the great. The magistracy itself was metamorphosed. All who resorted to Versailles partook of its manners. The difference of accent was lost in the polish of society. The rust of ancient manners disappeared. All orders of men mingled.

The provinces were deserted. The misery of the country, the luxury of the city ; the ambition, the amours, the reputation of the prince, and his conquests ; the romantic feasts of his court ; the pleasures even of the mind drew every body to the capital. They went there in crowds ; quitted there prejudices, blushed for their manners, and at once polished, enriched, and corrupted themselves.

It is easy to see what influence all these changes, and this universal intercourse must have had upon the women. Gallantry became the fashion, and freedom of manners a grace. Every body imitated the

the court; and, from one end of the kingdom to the other, the vices circulated with the accomplishments.

Another revolution accompanied that of the manners.

In a country where society and letters begin to be cultivated, a taste for literature must prevail among the women. But, as that taste is slowly formed; because the delicate feeling which discovers the natural and the graceful, and which enables us to paint them with truth, is acquired by habit; as we are apt to think that must be admired which has cost us much trouble, and that it must be the more so the less it resembles any other composition; as what is false often appears fine, because it presents a new colouring, and shades part of the object to make the rest spring out; as, in short, whatever is the prevailing humour is carried to extravagance, wit must at first be mistaken for genius;—the women, who attempted to distinguish themselves, invented expressions which were much ad-

admired, because they were little understood. They made use of singular words, when they were at a loss for ideas; and, to avoid being common, they became ridiculous.

Every thing contributed to this delirium:—the Italian and Spanish books, which were still much in vogue; the romances of Mademoiselle Scudery; the real admiration of what they called the *PRECIEUSES*; the conversations of the hotel de Rambouillet; in short, the society and the imposing name of Madame de Longueville; who, after being in the sweep and at the head of factions, old, and without lovers, as without cabal, amused herself in writing metaphysically upon love, and logically upon wit; and who tastelessly preferred Voiture to Corneille.

Moliere, by attacking with ridicule the learning of women, made not only its extravagancies, but the taste itself, disappear. Some women afterwards devoted themselves to letters, and some cultivated

vated the sciences ; but that spirit was by no means general.

In the most enlightened age, women were not permitted to be intelligent, without becoming the objects of derision. They were obliged to hide themselves to improve their minds ; and they blushed on the discovery of their knowledge, as much as, in ruder ages, they had blushed on the discovery of an intrigue.

As all good has its excess, and a proverb cannot need a reason ; by associating what is ridiculous with what is respectable, the learning of women, like every thing else, may be brought into contempt. To examine the question however impartially, it appears, that in a country and in an age very remote from that primitive innocence which attaches the heart to the pure pleasures of retirement, and which makes us happy in the ignorance of every thing — but our duty ; in an age when the general manners are corrupted by idleness ; when all the vices mingle by dissipation ; and when the vir-

tues cannot be replaced, or supplied, but by the help of reason, instead of deterring women from instructing themselves, it must be necessary to encourage them. Not all the humour of Moliere had been able to raise a laugh against the lovely sex, on account of their learning if he had not substituted folly for wisdom. Socrates perished by such a misapplication of ridicule.

If Moliere, in place of ridiculing the abuse of learning in women, had exhibited an example of its happy effects, opposed to thoughtless levity and giddy amusement ; if he had painted a woman, young and beautiful, whose mind was opened by a liberal education, and who retained all the graces of her sex ; who could think deeply, but who assumed nothing ; who covered her knowledge with a gentle veil, and who always had a facility of temper, a presence of mind, and an ease of manner, which made her most profound reasonings appear to be the result of nature ; who could estimate and feel the greatest concerns, without being
above

above the least ; who prosecuted her speculations only to heighten the commerce of friendship, and render more exquisite the intercourse of affection ; who, in studying and knowing the heart of man, had learned to have more indulgence for his weaknesses, and more respect for his virtues ; who, in short, ranked her duties above all things, but her mental accomplishments next to her duties, and who only employed in study what may be called the void of life—the intervals of society, and the recesses of domestic affairs, in bettering her heart by embellishing her understanding ;—he would have done a real service to women, to virtue, to his country, and to the world.

But though the women under Lewis XIV. were, in general, laughed out of their passion for letters, the politeness of the age introduced a spirit somewhat allied to it, and which was then much in fashion, particularly at court. It may be called the TALENT OF SOCIETY: an amiable kind of genius which delights in

light graces, which is fonder of beauty than sublimity, and which borrows few of its ornaments from science, or does it in so easy a way that ignorance cannot be jealous, and knowledge dares not blame; which throws out agreeable trifles, and which sometimes can bring itself to compose with elegance a few facetious or sprightly verses; which always charms in conversation, without seeming to aim at it; which pleases every body; which humbles nobody; and even when it shines most, which has a manner that pleads its excuse, and makes us perceive that it is free from ostentation or vanity. Such was the well-known genius of la Fayette, of Ninon, of la Suze; of la Sabliere and of Sevigne; of Thianges and of Montepan; of the dutchess of Bouillon, and of the fair Hortensa Mancini her sister; in short, of Madame de Maintenon; who, when young, was the delight of Paris, and till she inhabited a court, and was condemned to grandeur and to care*.

After

* Among those celebrated women, we always distinguish Madame de la Fayette and Madame de Sevigne. Madame de la Fayette, so well known by her ingenious

After all these accomplished women, commended with levity by the poets, or gravity by the orators, there are still two, who, though of a rank and order different, arrived nevertheless at the highest celebrity. The one is the famous Mademoiselle de Scudery, who lived to the age of eighty-five, sixty years of which period she spent in writing with elegance some pretty verses, which are still admired, and with an amazing facility voluminous romances, which are no more read. These romances however were once able to turn heads ; and the prejudice

ous romances, full of sweet sensibility, joined to a sound understanding all the graces of wit and character. It was she who first introduced into the romance sentiment in place of adventure, and agreeable men instead of heroes. She performed in her walk what Racine did in his. In substituting interest for incident, and men for prodigies, she proved, that we love better to be moved than astonished.

Madame de Sevigné has formed, without design, of her letters written occasionally, a most enchanting book. Full of imagination in her stile, she has almost created a new language. She throws out every moment expressions, which the head could not suggest, and which a sensible heart can only feel.

N. B. Most of those elegant women were celebrated by the poets of their age; but it is remarkable, that in all the verses of Boileau there is not to be found the name of a single woman of his time.

prejudice in favour of her manner was almost a match for the satires and taste of Boileau. The other is the learned Mademoiselle le Febvre, so well known under the name of Madam Dacier. Her merit, it is true, was not that of a woman, but she chose a good time to assume the character of a man; and, though she had not the manner of Ninon, she did not want her admirers. The two languages natural to her, were those of Terence and Homer; and madrigals were often sent to her in Greek and Latin. The most learned men in Europe conspired to found her praise.

I say nothing of the other women who wrote about the same time. The catalogue is every where to be found. Besides, I speak only here of the women whose genius had a character, and who can serve to illustrate the ideas or the manners of their age. This is a picture, not a history.

The result of the manners, and the general character of the women of that age was

was, a voluptuousness united with decency ; activity directed to intrigue ; little learning ; many accomplishments ; a refined politeness ; a remnant of empire over men ; a respect for all the religious ideas, which mingled themselves with that coquetry of manners, and remorse always by the side, or in the train of love.

During the regency, and under the reign of Lewis XV. the manners underwent another revolution. The latter years of Lewis XIV. had shed over the court, and part of the nation, an air of dejection and melancholy. At bottom the inclinations were the same ; but they were more repressed. A new court and new ideas changed all things. A bolder sensuality became the fashion. The desires grew more confident and impetuous ; and part of the veil which covered gallantry was torn away. Decency, which had hitherto been respected as a duty, was not even regarded as a pleasure. Shame was mutually communicated — and mutually pardoned. Levity joined itself to excess ; and a corruption was formed

at

at the same time frivolous and deep, which laughed at every thing, that it might blush at nothing.

The ruin of families, and the shifting of fortunes, precipitated this change. Excessive misery and excessive luxury were the consequences ;— and the influence of these is known. A sudden revolution rarely happens in the property of a people, without a quick alteration in manners.

For upwards of six centuries, gallantry had formed the character of the nation ; but the spirit of chivalry always mingled itself with that sentiment ; which spirit, inseparably connected with honour, gave to gallantry at least the RESEMBLANCE of love, and to vice as much of virtue as its nature is susceptible of. But when few traces of ancient honour remained, gallantry itself was lost ; it became a sentiment which always supposed weakness, or endeavoured to produce it.

In the mean time, by that general sympathy

pathy which attracted all ranks, the taste for the society of women increased, and the intercourse of the sexes became more frequent. Hope grew more sanguine, as seduction grew more easy. The men every day associated less with each other; the women, less timid, threw off that decent reserve which is their honour. The two sexes changed characters; the men set too high a value upon personal charms, the women on independence.

As the youths were more anxious to be men of the world than men of business, they entered sooner into society. These young men, corrupted by the libertine part of the other sex, joined the faults of their age to those of their character. Having in general more desires than ideas, an empty head and an unprincipled heart,—inconstant through vanity, or multiplying their amours from idleness,—setting no value upon opinion, which for them indeed had no existence,—they communicated to a great number of women their vices and irregularities.

The

The irksomness of time, and the universal desire to please, spread still wider and wider the spirit of society, till the nation arrived at its present state of sociability and general intercourse; where manners and character are sacrificed to elegance and politeness, while virtue and sentiment are exchanged for pleasure and amusement.

SECTION VII.

Of the Progress of Society in BRITAIN,
and of the Character, Manners, and
Talents of the BRITISH WOMEN.

WHAT polished nations understand by society, appears to have been little known in England, before the reign of Henry VIII. This backwardness may in some measure be ascribed to our continual wars with France and with Scotland: by our quarrels with the one we were shut out from foreign intercourse, and by our hostilities with both we were diverted from cultivating the arts of peace.

The

The spirit of chivalry, which produced such amazing effects on the Continent, was more weakly felt here. Edward III. had indeed established the order of the garter; but real wars allowed the knights little time for the mock encounter, or the generous visions of romantic heroism; and love was still a simple passion, which led the shortest way to its gratification, and generally in conformity with law and custom. It partook little of imagination; and, consequently, required few perfections in its object: it aspired neither at angels nor goddesses.

The women, who still retained all their native innocence and modesty, were regarded only as wives and mothers. Where qualifications are not demanded they will never be found: the accomplishments of the sex entitled them to no other character; and it had perhaps been happy for both sexes, if they could have remained in such a state of simplicity.

The Scots, by means of their alliance
VOL. II. H with

with France, which had subsisted for several centuries, and that spirit of adventure which has at all times led them abroad in quest of reputation, civil or military, may be supposed at this time to have been better acquainted with the elegancies of life than their wealthy and powerful neighbours :— and we actually find, in the court of James IV. a taste in music, in letters, and in gallantry, to which the great monarch of the house of Tudor and his haughty barons were yet strangers.

But the political state of both kingdoms was an insuperable bar to all liberal intercourse. The barons, or chiefs, were hostile to the court, from which they had every thing to fear, and nothing to hope ; they were dreaded by it in their turn ; they looked from the walls of their castles with a jealous eye on each other ; they never went abroad but attended by a numerous train of domestics ; they visited each other with the state, and the diffidence of neighbouring princes ; their marriages were contracted from family motives, and their courtships were conducted

ducted with the greatest form, and the most distant respect. They took liberties indeed with the women of inferior condition, and they rioted in thoughtless jollity with their dependents : but the ideas of inferiority and dependence are incompatible with those of society and gallantry.

Henry VII. by curbing the hostile spirit of the Barons, by abridging their power, by diminishing their retainers; by extending commerce; by encouraging agriculture; by securing peace to his subjects, at home and abroad, prepared the way for learning, arts and elegance. But the taste of the nation was not yet ripe for their reception; and the temper of his son Henry VIII. was not highly favourable to such a revolution. That prince, however, by his taste for tournaments, fostered the spirit of chivalry; and, by his passion for controversy, he encouraged a species of learning, though not the most agreeable: by his magnificence and profusion he drew the nobility to court; who, since deprived of their

judicial authority, had less business to detain them in the country; and, by his interviews with the emperor and the French King, he roused their emulation of foreign elegance: they were smit with the love of letters and of gallantry. The earl of Surrey, in particular, celebrated his mistress in his verses, and defended her honour with his sword, against all who dared with unhallowed lips profane her immaculate name.

The women in this reign likewise began to discover a taste for literature and politeness. The countess of Richmond, mother to Henry VII. and who survived him, had shewn the way. She translated two pious treatises from the French; and was a great patroness of learning. Elizabeth Blount, mistress to Henry VIII. was a woman of elegant accomplishments; and his last queen Catherine Parr, wrote with facility both in Latin and in English, and appears besides, to have been a woman of address.

But the house of Sir Thomas Moore, whose

whose eldest daughter, Mrs. Roper, has been already mentioned among the learned women of this period, seems in a more particular manner to have been the habitation of the Muses, and even of the Graces. He was possessed of all the learning of antiquity ; he was pious even to weakness ; for he appears to have given credit to the prophecies of the Maid of Kent ; but neither his religion nor his learning soured his temper, or blunted his taste for society. His ideas of the female character would do honour to a gentleman of the present age. In an elegant Latin poem to a friend on the choice of a wife, he speaks to the following purpose. ‘ May you meet with
 ‘ a wife not stupidly silent, nor always
 ‘ prattling nonsense ; may she be learned,
 ‘ if possible, or at least capable of being
 ‘ made so. A woman thus accomplish-
 ‘ ed will be always drawing sentiments
 ‘ and maxims out of the best authors.
 ‘ She will be herself, in all the changes
 ‘ of fortune ; neither blown up with
 ‘ prosperity, nor broken in adversity.
 ‘ You will find in her an even, cheerful,

' good-humoured friend, and an agree-
 ' able companion for life. She will in-
 ' fuse knowledge into your children with
 ' their milk, and from their infancy train
 ' them up to wisdom. Whatever com-
 ' pany you are engaged in, you will long
 ' to be at home; and will retire with
 ' delight from the society of men, into
 ' the bosom of a woman who is so dear,
 ' so knowing, and so amiable. If she
 ' touches her lute, and more particularly
 ' if she sings to it any of her own com-
 ' positions, it will sooth your solitude,
 ' and her voice will sound sweeter in
 ' your ear than the song of the nightin-
 ' gale. You will spend whole days and
 ' nights with pleasure in her company,
 ' and you will be always finding out new
 ' beauties in her mind. She will keep
 ' your soul in perpetual serenity; she
 ' will restrain its mirth from being dis-
 ' lute, and prevent its melancholy from
 ' becoming painful.'—According to these
 ideas he educated his three daughters,
 whose virtues and talents appear to have
 merited all his care. They lived for some
 time in one house, with their father, their
 husbands,

husbands, and their children, and formed a society, all things considered, which has seldom, if ever, been equalled, in any age or country ;— where morals were sublimed by religion ; where manners were polished by a sense of elegance, and softened by a desire to please ; where friendship was warmed by love, and strengthened by the ties of blood ;— while conversation, animated by genius, enriched by learning, and moderated by respect, exulting in the dignity of its objects, seemed to approach to that fine transport, which immortal beings may be supposed to feel in pouring out their contemplations of the wisdom and goodness of the Creator ; and, when it condescended to treat of lighter subjects, wit had a spring, humour a flow, and sentiment a poignancy, which those who are eternally discouraging of trifles, who hover continually on the surface of the earth, and rove like butterflies from sense to sense, both in their lives and conversations, can have no conception.

The religious contests, the reformation
tions

tions, and the persecutions, which disfigured the latter part of the reign of Henry VIII. and which continued, with little intermission, till the death of queen Mary, were a great bar to the progress of elegance and politeness in England: but it may be doubted how far they were hurtful to learning or to manners. Both parties, and both sexes, were uncommonly zealous to distinguish themselves by virtues and by talents. Lady Jane Gray, and the three Seymours, who lived in this period, have already been mentioned among the ornaments of the sixteenth century. Queen Mary herself was a writer of no mean rank; and Mary Roper, grand-daughter of Sir Thomas More, and one of the GENTLE-WOMEN, as they were then called, of her majesty's PRIVY-CHAMBER, is said to have possessed all the learning and accomplishments of her mother. She must have done honour to the court.

The reign of Elizabeth is justly considered as one of the most shining periods in English history; and for purity
of

of manners, vigour of mind, vigour of character, and personal address. it is perhaps unequalled.

The magnificent entertainments which that illustrious princess so frequently gave her court, and at which she generally appeared in person, with a most engaging familiarity, rubbed off the ancient reserve of the nobility, and increased the taste of society, and even of gallantry: but the masculine boldness of her character was unfavourable to female graces. The women of her court, like herself, were rather objects of respect than love. Their virtues were severe; their learning, their talents were often great: they had passions, but they knew to suppress them, or to divert them into the channel of interest or ambition. They did not however want their admirers. Men were less delicate in those days.

Spenser, by writing his *Fairy Queen*, revived in Britain the spirit of chivalry, at a time when it began to expire on the continent, and Sir Philip Sidney, in his *Arcadia*,

Arcadia, refined on that sentiment. The Fairy Queen was intended as a compliment to Elizabeth ; and the Arcadia was dedicated by Sir Philip to his sister, the countess of Pembroke, the most amiable and accomplished woman of her time*.

But the most remarkable women of this reign were the Lady Burleigh, the Lady Bacon, the Lady Ruffel, and Mrs. Killgrew, all daughters of Sir Anthony Cooke, and all distinguished for learning, genius, and virtue.

Elizabeth herself was a great and singular character. But she had few qualities to recommend her as a woman, though passionately fond of personal admiration ; nor were her talents as a writer either striking or elegant, though she appears to have been ambitious of literary fame.

Her

* The following ingenious and well known verses were intended as part of her epitaph.

Underneath this sable herse
Lies the subject of all verse;
Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother—
Death! ere thou hast kill'd another,
Fair, and learn'd, and good as she,
Time shall throw a dart at thee.

Her ability as a sovereign has been already considered, in treating of the talent of women for government. Her virtues were those of her rank, and of her age ; and her weakness, those of her sex : yet they failed to render her amiable.

Mary queen of Scotland, (whose learning and accomplishments have been already mentioned) the cotemporary of Elizabeth, and her rival in beauty, in letters, and in sway, though a less perfect, is a more attractive character. While we blame her conduct she conciliates our affection. Even those who accuse her of guilt, must weep for her misfortunes ; and will feel their bosoms swell with indignation against her inhuman subjects, and her perfidious protectress, while they read her unhappy story, as told by her enemies.

The return of Mary to her native kingdom, after the death of her husband Francis II. with all the elegancies of France superadded to the finest natural endowments, made the Scots hope, and
not

not without reason, that literature, arts, and politeness, would arrive at perfection among them, as soon as in any northern nation. But the spirit of fanaticism, which awaked in Scotland about this time, which was attended with such amazing effects, and which spread itself over the whole island ; which produced the death of the lovely Mary, of the pious Charles, and which terminated in the expulsion of the royal house, threw a cloud over the manners and the studies of that country, which two centuries have scarcely been able to dispel*.

The accession of James VI. to the throne of England, contributed still farther to obstruct the progress to civilization in Scotland, and to the decline of the arts in that country. The removal of the court, drew the nobility to London, to spend their fortunes, or obtain preferment ; and men of genius and learning likewise looked this way.

That

* A bold spirit of liberty and independence however, which has been productive of many great and beneficial consequences, mingled itself with that fanatical spirit, and ought for ever to free the Scots from the imputation of servility.

That event, however, must have contributed to the advancement of society in England. Yet not so much as might be expected. The scantiness of James's revenue, together with his want of œconomy, rendered him unable to support the splendor of a court. It was besides inconsistent with his maxims of policy, and with his temper. He loved to be social with his friends, but hated a crowd ; and had rather an aversion to the company of woman. A mean jealousy, which took place of a generous emulation, between the Scots and English courtiers, prevented still farther the refinement of manners ; which can only be effected by a liberal intercourse.

The nobility and gentry of England are still fonder of a country life than those of any polished nation in Europe : it prevailed much more then, and was highly encouraged by James. . He even issued proclamations, containing severe threatnings against the gentry who lived in town. By these means the ancient pride of family was preserved. Men of

birth were distinguished by a stateliness of carriage : much ceremony took place in the ordinary commerce of life ; and, as riches acquired by trade were still rare, little familiarity was indulged by the great.

The king's pacific, or rather pusillanimous disposition, though it sunk the national character, was favourable to commerce, and not altogether unfriendly to letters. James himself was a scholar ; but he was unhappy in a bad taste, which infected his whole court, and indeed the whole nation. He was fond of metaphysical quibbles, the jingle of words, and every species of false wit. Such a taste is in some measure inseparable from the revival of letters : we admire what is glaring, before we can discern what is beautiful ; but the sanction, and even the example of the monarch, only could have carried it to such a height at this time in England. What induces one particularly to this opinion is, the comparative purity of the writers of the former reign. The contrast between the composition of
Spencer

Spencer and Drayton, is as great as between the character of Elizabeth and James.

The theatre, that great former of manners, and which is formed by them, had been founded by Shakespeare under the reign of Elizabeth: he was succeeded by Jonson and Fletcher. These writers have seldom painted the manners of their own country, and seldomer those of their own age; but, as they must have endeavoured to please the people for whom they wrote, and as they no doubt knew the taste of the public, we may discern that taste more perfectly in their compositions than in the barren records of the times.

In the writings of Shakespeare we find all the noble spirit of the virgin-reign. Love has its native importance; and little more: it is productive of the greatest events, when connected with circumstances: but, when a simple passion, its effects are feeble and transient. He seldom attempts to be wanton; but when his subject makes it necessary to reveal the secrets

of Venus, he does it with as much freedom as if she were a common prostitute : he expresses his meaning in the plainest, and often in the broadest words.

But in the writings of Fletcher, — for I shall omit Jonson, as being a cotemporary of Shakespeare, and therefore less proper to mark the gradation of taste, — love has acquired an imaginary power : it is equal to every thing in itself ; and seems to disregard those circumstances which alone can give it consequence ; without which it is a boyish passion, that excites our contempt ; but, connected with which, it is the strongest sentiment of our nature, and awakens most deeply the feelings of the human breast. He is frequently wanton, with a grace peculiar to himself ; — for a genteel education and a good natural taste conspired to render him the most elegant writer of his age — he veils his idea beneath the delicacy of his language, or toys with it so prettily, that we often fall in love with a thought, which, rudely disclosed, could not fail to disgust.

We may therefore conclude, that the passion, or rather the commerce, between the sexes was increased ; that it was ambitious of being thought more important than it really was ; that it had purposes to carry which made such exaggeration necessary, that it had wishes to reveal which it durst not avow ; and which, consequently, suggested the disguise of delicate expression. The duel, we know, had taken place of the tournament ; and the intrigue, we may be certain, would not be long behind.

Under Charles I. a good taste in letters, in arts, and in society, began to prevail. The king himself was both a judge and an example of fine writing ; and he was a lover of painting, music, and architecture ; all which he liberally encouraged. But the religious and political disputes, which early in this reign divided the nation, and which brought about the death of the king, and the subversion of the monarchy, diverted the thoughts of men from every elegant pursuit. The dread of popery and arbitrary power, of

slavery and eternal damnation, and the hope of heaven, and of liberty, threw the whole island into the most violent convulsions, and gave birth to some of the greatest geniuses, and called forth some of the greatest characters, in the history of mankind.

The cavaliers, or royal party, however, notwithstanding the horrors of civil war, maintained a gaiety of temper which was altogether astonishing, and a freedom of manners which too often bordered on licentiousness. But the republicans, though perhaps not infected with fewer vices, and those of a less amiable cast, discover so much vigour of mind, such a resolute spirit of action, a love of freedom, and a contempt of death, that we almost despise the polish of society, — even while we detest the cant of hypocrisy.

The most distinguished women of this period, in Britain, were the Duchesses of
Newcastle,

Newcastle, Lady Pakington, and Lady Halket*.

Under the commonwealth the face of the nation was entirely changed; it experienced a revolution, as complete in manners as in policy. One would have imagined himself in a different world. The theatres were shut; games, sports, shews, and amusements of every kind were prohibited. Instead of the voice of mirth

* The Duchess of Newcastle has left us a variety of compositions both in prose and verse, (tragedies, comedies, essays, histories, orations, letters,) of no mean character. She appears to be the first English lady who attempted what is now called *polite literature*; which ought to be some apology for her want of correctness.

Lady Pakington has long been the *reputed*, and, from the proofs produced by Mr Ballard, it appears the *real* author of *The Whole Duty of Man*, and several other moral and divine treatises; which are written with so much temper, purity, piety, philosophy, and good sense, that she may be justly reckoned the glory of her sex, and an honour to human nature. What greatness of mind and goodness of heart must the person be possessed of, who could deny herself the honour of such works, lest the name of a woman should render them of less service to mankind!

Lady Halket was remarkable for her learning, and for her skill both in physic and divinity. Her writings are all of the religious kind, and are voluminous beyond all credibility.

mirth and joy, nothing was to be heard but groans, sighs, prayers, and spiritual songs. All liberal knowledge, ornamental learning, gentility of manner, elegance of dress, and all superfluity in eating and drinking were proscribed, as carnal vanities, and as the accomplices of sin and Satan. All ranks, ages, and sexes were confounded. The illuminations of the spirit placed all on a level. The leaders of the republic prayed, or exhorted one while, and listened the next to the meanest of the people. Women taught the brethren.

Those fair divines, by reason of their finer feelings and more vivid imaginations, were often carried into the most extraordinary severities, and the wildest enthusiasm. They were not contented with laying aside the allurements of their sex, with making a covenant with their eyes that they should not rove, and with crucifying their thoughts; they condemned themselves to humiliation and fasting, for the wandering of their hearts. Many of them considered cloaths of any kind to be improper. Whether this
 opinion

opinion proceeded from their looking upon dress as a luxury, or as unnecessary to the truly regenerate, does not distinctly appear ; but one of them, animated by that persuasion, came into the church where the Protector sat, in the condition of our original mother before she plucked the fig-leaf, ' to be,' as she said, ' a sign to the people.'

The men in general held in contempt all books but the Bible; and some of them were even above using that: they believed themselves illuminated by the same spirit which inspired the sacred writings. One man, from the superabundance of this inward light, and a certain resemblance between his countenance and the common pictures of Christ, conceived himself to be the saviour, — no doubt sent to earth a second time, to collect the faithful, and begin his millennial reign*. He pretended to work miracles: to cure the sick, to raise the dead; and entered Bristol mounted

* Some have believed the millennium to be before, others after the resurrection.

on a HORSE — perhaps he thought an ASS too mean an animal, and that he had now a right to assume more dignity — while his disciples spread their garments before him, crying, ‘ Hosanna ! to the Highest.’

Love under the commonwealth, was a mixture of cant and hypocrisy. Never was beauty so much in disgrace. It was not only denied all adventitious ornaments and excellencies, but even the advantages of nature were subject of reproach : — it was forbid to please ; and it was criminal to consider it as an object of desire.

‘ Man,’ said the godly. — for so they called themselves, — ‘ is conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity ; he is a slave to the flesh, till regenerated by the spirit ; it was his complacency in woman that first wrought his debasement : let him not therefore glory in his shame, let him not worship the fountain of his corruption !’

The emotions of nature were considered as the struggles of original guilt ; and beauty was viewed as a spell in the hands of Satan, to seduce the hearts of the faithful. The pleasures of the marriage-bed were only indulged as the means of preventing a greater evil, and of increasing the number of the saints ; nor even then without fear and trembling, humiliation, and prayer, ' that they might be separated from the CURSE !'

But the restoration of monarchy made ample amends to beauty for the indignities of the commonwealth. The reign of Charles II. may be considered in one light, as the most glorious era to women in the history of Britain, and as the most debasing in another. They were never so much caressed ; never so little respected.

Charles himself had a susceptible, but changeable heart ; a social temper ; a genteel manner ; a lively wit :— and his courtiers partook much of the character of their master. They had all suffered the

the pressure of adversity, the neglect of poverty, or felt the insolence of pious tyranny. They began to think that Christianity was a fable; that virtue was a cheat; that friendship and generosity were but words of course; and, in greedily enjoying their change of fortune, they sunk themselves beneath the dignity of men. In avoiding spiritual pride, and in retaliating selfishness, they departed from the essential principles of religion and morals; and, by contrasting the language and the manners of hypocrisy, they shamelessly violated the laws of decency and decorum.

Overjoyed at the return of their sovereign, the whole royal party dissolved in thoughtless jollity; and even many of the republicans, particularly the younger class, and the women, were glad to be released from the gloomy austerity of the commonwealth. A general relaxation of manners took place. Pleasure became the universal object, and love the prevailing taste: but that love was rather an appetite than a passion. Beauty

Beauty, unconnected with virtue, was its object: it was therefore void of honour and attachment. In consequence of such manners, female virtue, robbed of its reward, became rather a mode of behaviour, to inflame desire, or procure elevation, than a sentiment or principle; and, of course, sooner or later, was either sacrificed to inclination or to caprice.

But these observations, in their full extent, must only be understood of the court. The greater part of the gentry still resided on their estates in the country, equally strangers to the pleasures of the court and town; and one half of the island was filled with indignation at the vices of Whitehall. Nor without reason; for it was little better than one great brothel — and the stage, which generally takes its complexion from the court, was a continued scene of sensuality, blasphemy, and absurdity.

The free intercourse, however of all ranks of men, from the king to the com-

Moner, improved the talent of society, and polished the language of conversation; gallantry, licentious as it was, produced a habit of politeness; and from the irregular, and even impious freedom of writing and thinking, sprung many strokes of real genius, and a liberal spirit of inquiry, whose researches and experiments have benefited mankind, and carried philosophy and the sciences to a height that does honour to modern times*.

The women of this reign, as may be expected from the taste of the men, were more solicitous about adorning their persons, than informing their minds. But the frequent intercourse between the sexes in some measure compensated that neglect. By such a commerce they became more easy, more free, more lively, and more capable of conversation, than the women of any preceding age. They had less learning, but more accomplishments; and perhaps, more genius. They

* The royal Society was founded under Charles II.

wanted nothing but virtue to have made their memories immortal : and, notwithstanding the general depravity, there were some who trod the narrow path ; whose taste and sentiments were uncorrupted, and whose names still live in their writings, and in the verses of their cotemporaries. Katherine Philips, (celebrated under the name of Orinda) Anne Killegrew, and Anne Wharton, employed their elegant talents in a manner suitable to their sex. The female wantons of most genius were Behn and Centlivre, whose writings are both their honour and their disgrace*. — Among the women of elegant, or spirited conversation, we should perhaps distinguish the Dutchess of York, the Dutchess of Cleveland, Lady Chesterfield, and the fair Hamilton.

The reign of James II. was too short to have any distinct character. It is only singular for the blind bigotry, and blinder

* From this censure however, may be excepted the History of Oroonoko, and the Comedy of the Busy Body.

disposition of the prince ; which roused the minds of men from the delirium of pleasure, in which they had been lost, and brought about the Revolution.

Under William III. the effects of that change were visible on the manners. The nation returned to what may be called its natural state. An attention to just politics, to sound philosophy, and true religion, characterize the era of British liberty.

William himself was of a gloomy temper, and had a dislike to the company of women. The intercourse of the sexes, and those amusements which are its consequence, were therefore little countenanced during his reign. By these means the ladies had more time for the pursuits of learning and knowledge ; and they made use of it accordingly. Many of them became adepts in the sciences. Lady Masham, and Mary Astell, in particular, discussed with judgment and ability the most abstract points
in

in metaphysics and divinity*; and Lady Grae Gethin, at the age of twenty, treated of life and morals with the discernment of Socrates; and the elegance of Xenophon. She is celebrated by Mr. Congreve.

The reign of queen Anne may be said to have been the summer, of which William's was only the spring. Every thing was ripened; nothing was corrupted. It was a short, but glorious period, of heroism and national capacity; of taste and science; learning and genius; of gallantry without licentiousness, and politeness without effeminacy.

We are in doubt which most to admire in the women of this reign, the

* These two ladies differed on a very delicate point. Mary affirmed, that we ought to love with *desire* God only, every other love being *sinful*. Lady Masham opposed that doctrine, as a dangerous refinement. Each had her abettors. Miss Astell was supported by Mr. Norris, and Lady Masham by Mr. Locke.—They were both great advocates for the learning of women; and their arguments and example appear to have roused many of the sex to a more serious attention to religion and morality.

manners, the talents, or the accomplishments. They were religious without severity, and without enthusiasm; they were learned without pedantry; they were intelligent and attractive, without neglecting the duties of their sex; they were elegant and entertaining, without levity; in a word, they joined the graces of society to the knowledge of letters and the virtues of domestic life — they were friends and companions, without ceasing to be wives and mothers.

In support of the foregoing character of the British ladies under the reign of queen Anne, we need only add the names of Lady Chudleigh, Lady Winchelsea, the honourable Mrs. Monk, Mrs. Bovey, and Stella *.

Under

* Of these ladies, Mrs. Bovey is perhaps the least known, as she has left no writings, and had no poetical lover to spread her name. She is, however, very handsomely complimented by Sir Richard Steele, in the dedication of the second volume of *The Ladies Library*; and Mrs. Manley, who wanted only virtue to have been an ornament to her age, and to her sex, gives the following elegant character of her in *The New Atalantis*. " Her person has as many charms as can be desired;
' her

Under George I. the manners of the nation were sensibly changed ; but not so much as the national spirit. The South Sea scheme, and other mercenary projects, produced a passion of avarice, and a taste of luxury, which prepared the way for all the corruptions of the following reign.

The delirium of riches was beyond what the most extravagant imagination can conceive. Any scheme, however absurd, met with encouragement, if it only proposed sufficient advantages. All ranks and conditions, and even women, resorted to 'Change-Alley, with the looks of harpies ready to seize upon their prey ; but, in reality, the victims of their own credulity and sordid passions. The peers of the realm became stock-jobbers, and its ministers brokers ; public virtue was lost in the visions of pri-

‘ her air, her manner, her judgement, her wit,
 ‘ her conversation, are admirable ; her sense is solid
 ‘ and perspicuous ; and she is so perfect an oeconomist,
 ‘ that, in taking in all the greater duties of life, she
 ‘ does not disdain to stoop to the most inferior ; in short,
 ‘ she knows all that a man can know, without despising
 ‘ what, as a woman, she ought not to be ignorant of.”

vate

vate benefit ; letters fell into contempt, though supported by the greatest examples of successful genius ; love grew covetous, and beauty venal.

There were however, in this reign, many women of liberal and elegant talents ; among the first of whom may be ranked Lady Mary W. Montague, so well known for her spirited poems, and ingenious letters.

Under George II. and George III. the debasement of mind discovered itself more fully in the manners. Corruption became general.

The Revolution had restrained the powers of the prince within such narrow limits, that a coalition of parties, or the absolute superiority of one, was essential to carry the measures of government ; and, as the opposition, or country party, began to gather strength, the political machine was in danger of standing still by counteracting forces. It was therefore necessary that there should be an ascendency ;

dency ; it was likewise perhaps necessary that it should be on the side of the court.

At this crisis Robert Walpole, an artful and able minister, a lover of peace and an encourager of commerce, found means to increase the influence of the crown without enlarging the prerogative. But he did it at the expence of the virtues of the people :— and his example has been followed by all succeeding ministers. He took advantage of that spirit of avarice and luxury which he had fostered ; the treasury was let loose at elections. A majority was obtained of the refuse of both parties ; of men determined to support the measures of the court in defiance of conscience, honour, and honesty— and who were only formidable by the number of their voices. Places and pensions were multiplied to reward the mercenary tribe ; and men of ability and integrity were deprived of their employments, to make way for those who were destitute of both. When virtue and talents are no longer the means of honour and preferment, they naturally disappear in the public walks.

walks of life ; they are only to be found in the solitary shade. Character ceased to create distinction. The effect of such a want of sentiment may easily be conceived. Patriotism became the common object of ridicule ; and virtue and genius were made the butt of ignorance, dullness, and profligacy. But people must always have something to be the foundation of self-applause. Instead of the essential qualities of men and of citizens, they valued themselves on a smooth address, and an absurd mixture of French levity and English gravity ; on the splendor of their equipages ; on the magnificence of their houses ; on the richness of their furniture ; and on the elegance and sumptuousness of their tables.

The ruin of many ancient families by the late visionary projects, and the excessive fortunes acquired by trade, contributed still farther to increase the general mass of manners. The pride of birth, the last barrier of corruption, was broken down. While people value themselves upon their ancestors, it is to be presumed,

ed, that their actions will not be altogether unworthy of them. The nobility courted the alliance of the wealthy, to enable them to support their state : they intermarried with the sons and daughters of commerce, without regard to character or accomplishments. Riches became the only idol of worship, and poverty the only object of contempt.

These however were not the only evils resulting from such a coalition. That respect to the higher orders of men, which is so necessary to preserve due subordination in a state, and that frugality and industry, which are so essential to the prosperity of traders, were at once destroyed by the union of the people of rank and commerce. The merchants soon vied with the peers of the realm, and the princes of the blood, in all the luxuries of life ; and, by degrees, people of all conditions came to think themselves entitled to the same indulgence ; till, at length, the nation arrived at its present state of sociability, luxury, and vicious refinement ; in which all ranks, ages, and sexes mingle,

gle, and all aspire at the same pleasures and the same amusements; in which taste is a title to enjoyment, and money an admittance to every polite circle, and to every august assembly; to the ruin of manners, industry, public credit, and private faith; and to the increase of sensuality, idleness, fraud, villainy, violence, and all the licentious disorders of a corrupted populace*.

The manners of the two sexes, as has been already observed, generally keep pace with each other. In proportion as the men grew regardless of character, the women neglected the duties of their sex. Though little inclined to hoarding, they are not perhaps less disposed to avarice than men: gold to them is desirable, as the minister of vanity, voluptuousness, and shew. It became their supreme ob-

* Some of the foregoing observations may perhaps be thought foreign to the subject of this Essay; but the manners of women are so intimately connected with the manners of men, and those of men with the state, in this country, that it is impossible to separate them entirely, without omitting many particulars necessary to be known for the perfect understanding of each.

ject, and the only source of the matrimonial union, to the exclusion of that tender sentiment which alone can give strength to the sacred tie, or pleasure to the nuptial state. The young, the beautiful, the healthful, were wedded — though not always with their own consent — to age, deformity, and disease; virtue was joined to profligacy, and wantonness to severity.

Such marriages were necessarily destructive of domestic felicity. The want of cordiality at home naturally leads us abroad, as the want of happiness in ourselves leads us to seek it in externals, and to torture imagination for the gratification of appetites, which, undepraved, are simple and uniform. New amusements, and societies of pleasure, were every day formed; new modes of dissipation were invented; the order of nature was changed; night and day were inverted; and fancy and language were exhausted for names to the assemblies of politeness and gallantry. Nothing is so oppressive as time to the unhappy, or thought to the

vacant mind: these were not all enough. They seemed afraid of themselves, and of each other. The husband had one set of visitors, the wife another; he prosecuted his pleasures abroad, she entertained her friends at home; or resorted to some place of public amusement, or private pleasure. In a free country, it is unpardonable in a man to accuse his wife without evidence, or to pretend to abridge her liberty; and the guilty are silent for their own sakes. It was often morning before they met at their joyless home.

A spirit of gaming, which mingled itself with dissipation and pleasure, afforded a new pretence for nocturnal meetings. Money lost at play must be paid somehow; it is a debt of honour: and, to preserve family-peace, it is to be feared that women of virtuous principles have often sacrificed something more precious than their jewels. At any rate gaming discovers the temper, ruffles the passions, corrupts the heart, and breaks down the strongest barrier of virtue, — a decent reserve between the sexes.

Love

Love grew confident, as beauty became more accessible; and the freedom of manners permitted the warmest declaration without offence. The opportunities of gratification were infinite; the motives of restraint were few; and the temptations were many and great. A general sensuality was the consequence. Conjugal infidelity became common.

Men of spirit obtained divorces. But these, instead of enforcing the obligation of the marriage-vow, by the fear of public shame, appeared to have a quite contrary effect; they only propagated weakness: the seducing example of human frailty remained, the odium was forgot; while the equity of the sentence was disputed, or its severity blamed. Husbands were loudly accused of libertinism, and justly of neglect. The women continued to make reprisals, or make up their wants; the practice triumphed. Prudent men overlooked such liberties, when conducted with decency, which it must be owned was seldom violated; and good-natured husbands in general begin to

adopt a polite opinion, which will at least be conducive to a private peace; viz. That a man is not more dishonoured by the AMOURS of his wife than by any other DEVIATION of taste, or than she is by those of her husband.

In short, unless manners take a turn, there is reason to believe that our British ladies, once so remarkable for modesty, chastity, and conjugal fidelity, will soon equal their sisters of France in impudence, levity, and incontinence; as we already rival our continental brethren in foppery, falshood, inconstancy, vanity, — and in all their unmanly pleasures, capricious appetites, and emasculating luxuries *.

But the fears of virtue are often groundless: fancy magnifies future evil,

* This character, in its full extent, must only be applied to the court and the capital. Two women of the distant counties still possess the domestic virtues in a considerable degree of perfection; the men are comparatively sober and faithful; and the manners of the whole northern part of the island, are only arriving at that degree of refinement which is favourable to industry, to virtue, and to letters.

and

and overlooks present good : we have dwelt long enough — some may perhaps think too long — on the dark side of the picture. Our fair country-women still possess many virtues, and more accomplishments. Their gallantries are at least regulated by a sense of decency : voluptuousness wears its loveliest form ; delicacy is the handmaid of pleasure : infidelity is oftener yet the effect of passion than of appetite ; and elopements are stronger proofs of sensibility than the want of shame.

Notwithstanding the general relaxation of manners, the aversion to whatever is ferious, the thirst of admiration, and the neglect of esteem, are at least of those qualities which produce it, there are in this age, in this island, and even in this city, women who would have done honour to any age or country ; who join a refined taste and cultivated understanding to a feeling heart, and who adorn their talents and their sensibility with sentiments of virtue, honour, and humanity. We have women who could

have reasoned with Locke, who might have disputed the laurel with Pope, and to whom Addison would have listened with pleasure.

Even in the middle of opulence, and of that luxury which too often mingles avarice with state, which narrow the heart, and makes it at the same time vain and cruel, we see women who yearly set apart a portion of their substance for the poor; who make it their business to find out abodes of misery, and who number among their pleasures the relief of the orphan, and the tears shed in the consolation of the widow.

We have still wives, young, beautiful, and affectionate, who honour their vows, and in the most delightful of human connections offer the most enchanting spectacle of innocence and love; who are not ashamed to be mothers; who devote their happy hours to the tenderest cares of nature; who watch with anxiety, who press with transport, by turns, in their lovely arms, to their lips, and to
their

their breast, the infant whom they nourish with their milk, while the husband, in silent joy, divides his fond regards between the mother and the child.

O that these sweet examples could revive among us nature and manners!— that we could learn how much the virtues, even for our happiness, are superior to the pleasures!— how much a simple, cordial life, where nothing is affected, where we live in ourselves, and in the objects of our sensibility, — where we enjoy by turns the delights of friendship, affection, and self-approbation, is preferable to that giddy and dissipated life, where we court continually a phantom which eludes our pursuit, or vanishes in our embrace!— Then the women would recover their empire; then beauty, adorned with virtue, would lead captive the hearts of men, — would restrain them from wandering, and teach them to be faithful, — happy in their servitude, and proud of their weakness; then a fine and blameless sensuality would season every moment of existence, and make life a
delicious

delicious dream ; then the pains of childbirth, unimpoisoned by remorse, a mother's pains, sweetened by love and participated by friendship, would be rather a conflict of tenderness than a torment.

Society, in such a world, would indeed be less busy ; but there would be more domestic peace. There would be less ostentation, and more pleasure ; less dissipation, and more happiness. We would talk less of pleasing, and we would please more. Our days would flow, like a pure and quiet stream ;— and if, in the evening of life, we had not the sorrowful satisfaction of having reciprocated the softest feelings with a hundred persons— of whom we were unworthy, who were unworthy of us, or who had no share in our hearts— we would at least have the comfort to have lived with those we loved, and would sweetly sink to rest, conscious of having extracted from the pleasures of to-day a charm to mingle with the joys of to-morrow.

SECTION VIII.

CONCLUSION.

LET us not however, dream of miracles; nor conclude, from the virtues of individuals, that the manners of the age are pure, or the characters of women in general respectable. Among a people where the spirit of society is carried so far, as it is at present both in France and in England, the domestic life must be little known. All the sentiments of nature, which spring up in retirement, and which are nursed in solitude, must be weakened. The women must therefore be less devoted to their original and most important duties; they must be less wives and mothers.

The manners now direct the prejudices, as much as the prejudices formerly directed the manners. The sacred attachments of love and friendship are exploded; they are banished to the shepherd and the savage. Why? — Because

cause they are unpolite : they shew too great a preference ; they pay to one, what is due to all.

The more the general tie extends, the more the particular ties are relaxed. We seem to be attached to all the world, and we are attached to nobody. Hence the increase of dissimulation and falsehood. The less we feel, the more we appear to feel.

By a strange contrast, we are enraptured at the word SENTIMENT ; — and all genuine sentiment is ridiculed. Perhaps we imagine, what we do not feel, does not exist ; and, indeed, we sufficiently vindicate ourselves from the imputation of real sentiment, by the artful declamation which we substitute in its place.

The word ROMANTIC was never so much in use. This happy term affords a double feast to vanity : it excuses esteem, or justifies contempt, to the virtues which we want ; and it prevents shame for the vices.

ices on the weaknesses which we have. It makes us content with our knowledge; we believe that we have estimated all things; and that we see both what man is, and what he can be.

We talk a great deal about pleasure, and we taste very little. The soul precipitates itself upon its objects, when it should keep them at a certain distance; desire is gratified, before it can awake the divinity of passion; the spell which enchanted the mind is too soon broke. Imagination turns cold, because it has nothing to create; illusion vanishes; sense grows dead. But what is sense, without passion and fancy?

The void which we experience, in consequence of false pleasure, and the want of energy in the soul, must have given birth to AMUSEMENT. the resource of cold hearts and empty heads; a word which is become important, and which must be ridiculous to the serious every time they use it; a word which implies

what has no connection with virtue, and none perhaps with the senses.

That amusement, that inexpressible something, which is neither imagination, reason, nor passion, and which consists principally in forms, being the universal taste, all things must comply with it. The accomplishments are supposed virtues, and the vices are pardoned. Almost nobody has the boldness to censure guilt, when it wears the habit of the Graces. The mind is contracted; the heart is shut; and attention is busied about trifles. To please or to displease are become the great words of language.

As we are continually under observation, self-love, by being more roused, must be more keen; but the same spirit which rouses it, likewise restrains it. It is curbed, and it is stimulated; its secret is rather veiled than hid, and yet is secure. The eyes of vanity are obscured by a mist, and the mutual feeling is willing to seem blind. Society is a fencing school or field of combat, where self-love encounters

counters self-love, and where each are desirous to conquer without the air of emulation: they disguise their efforts, that their pretensions may not be suspected.

From this assemblage of folly, vanity, and falsehood, must spring a restless levity in the commerce of the sexes, and a ferious and busy mockery of passion. But what above all characterises the manners of the present age, is the madness of shew; the frenzy of sacrificing every thing to appearance; the importance assigned to little duties, and the value set upon little objects. We talk gravely of the trifles of to-day, and of those of to-morrow. The soul has a languid, and never satisfied activity, which expands it over a thousand objects without interesting it in one, and which communicates motion without impulse.

But if a taste for letters, and a delirium of talents, mingle with the giddiness of society, from such a combination must result other effects. Then a general passion of appearing informed must

VOL. II.

M

prevail

prevail, without the time, or the trouble to be so ; then we must see a torrent of superficial knowledge, and a crowd of half-learned pretenders to science ; a multitude of philosophical ideas, which men of genius throw out in retirement, and which are greedily seized by people of fashion, disputed, repeated, and scattered in polite circles ; light conversations on profound subjects ; the laws of genius settled, and a genius of memory, when we have nothing original ; the establishment and the opposition of literary societies ; pretensions of all kinds, and of all denominations ; bold pretensions, cool and high pretensions, and cautious pretensions, with a mixture of reserve ; the fury of reputation, oftener usurped than real ; intrigue, flattery, and little arts to obtain it ; in short, the art of praising, to be praised ; the art of joining foreign merit to our own, and of procuring renown either by ourselves or by others.

As the general system of luminaries is greater, and as they communicate their influence

influence more fully by motion, the women, without giving themselves any trouble, must be more enlightened. But, faithful to their plan, they only cover knowledge as an ornament to the mind, as jewels are to the person. They study the arts rather from a desire to please, than a desire to know, or from the pleasure of learning; and they read more for amusement, than for instruction.

Besides, in a state of society where the motion is rapid, and where there is an eternal succession of objects and ideas, the women, constantly occupied in following the scene, which changes and flies incessantly round them, must know better the ideas of the present, than of past times, and those which are fashionable than those which are just. They must therefore be better acquainted with the language of the arts than with their principles, and have more unconnected ideas than useful or systematic knowledge.

It might perhaps be thought curious now to examine, what must be the con-

M 2

sequence

sequence of such a mixture of ideas and manners, of levity and learning, of philosophy in the head, and libertinism in the heart : that however is too self-evident to afford room for much disquisition. It might likewise perhaps be thought curious, to compare the characters of women, as they at present exist in London, and in Paris, with those which they have had in different periods, and which they now have in different countries ; with their sweet modesty in many parts of England ; with their timid reserve in Scotland ; with their tameness and want of passion in Holland ; with their mixture of devotion and sensuality in Italy ; with their warm imagination and keen sensibility in Spain ; with their profound retirement in China, where they have been separated during four thousand years from the intercourse of men ; in short, with the character and the manners which must result from their confinement in Turkey, in Persia, and over almost all Asia, where they only exist for one man ; where they can neither cultivate their character nor their reason ; and, des-

tined

fin'd to have only senses, where they are forced by the absurdity of their condition to join modesty to wantonness, and coquetry to retirement : — But, to complete such a parallel, it is sufficient to have hinted it.

I shall therefore only observe, that in the present age there are fewer panegyrics on women than in any former period. The poets seem to have lost that delicate gallantry which was so long their character. They are either Cynics or voluptuaries. The prevailing taste for women, indeed, which is neither love, nor passion, nor even gallantry, but the cold and barren effect of a habit of sensuality, can neither rouse imagination nor sentiment. In our numerous and growing assemblies, in the eternal round of dissipation and amusement, where the sexes mingle with freedom, we learn to admire less, because we learn to be more severe. Self-love, judge and rival, sometimes indulgent through pride, but always cruel from jealousy, was never more vigilant in spying faults, or sowing ridicule.

cule. Praise is the result of enthusiastic passion ; and never was there an age in which there was less than in this, though perhaps we affect more than our predecessors. Enthusiasm springs from a warm imagination, which creates objects in place of seeing them, and which heightens what it has seen. At present we see too much ; in consequence of which we feel too little. Beauty obtrudes itself on the view : its spots are too visible ; passion is disgusted ; and fancy sickens for want of exercise. Female delicacy is lost. Vice is ranked in the number of our accomplishments. The less we esteem the women, the more we pretend to know them :— and they at present make such a language necessary. Every boy has more pride than to seem acquainted only with their virtues ; and would be rakes, whose experience really reaches no further, that they may support a reputation with the sex, accuse them of more than human weakness, by contemptibly assuming a knowledge and a character to which they have no right.

Such,

Such, with regard to women, is the influence of that general spirit of society which they have inspired, and of which they do not fail to boast. They are like eastern monarchs, who are never more honoured than when they are least seen : by discovering themselves too freely to their subjects, they have encouraged them to revolt.

But, least the ladies should take offence at being compared to tyrants, I will give them a gentler simile ; which I shall introduce with a short analysis of female society, as it progresses in countries where the soft affections exercise their sweetest influence. — In a state of nature, the company of women is little desired ; their beauties are unveiled to every eye ; and their favours are bestowed without courting. In the early periods of society, they are principally valued on account of their utility ; their condition approaches to servitude ; and little delicacy is observed in the commerce of love. As society advances, they are prized as objects of pleasure : conscious of their importance,

importance, they become more delicate of their beauties, reserved in their manner, and nice of their favours. Love grows jealous, and beauty undergoes a degree of restraint. But as the mind opens, and when society is better understood, such restraint is thought unjust — ungenerous to the partners of our dearest interests, our sweetest pleasures ! — and inconsistent with that confidence which is due to love, to virtue, to mankind, and which is essential to our own peace. The freedom of nature is restored, within the pale of society. Beauty becomes more brilliant, more alluring, — but less engaging. Man ceases to adore what is familiar to his eye. Like her emblematic flower, the same sun that beholds the glory of woman may be said to be witness to her disgrace : her nature is too delicate to support the beams of general admiration ; she opens her attractions too fully to the heart ; she yields too freely her sweetness to the breath of praise ; and, if she does not sink into her original neglect, she experiences a fate little more to be envied ;

she

she is rudely pluckt by every spoiler ;
and, when her virtues are evaporat-
ed, the pride of creation is viewed with
contempt.

I shall therefore conclude with advi-
sing the gentle sex, to leave a remnant
of authority in the hands of the men,
and to keep a little reserve in their own ;
as the best means of securing the hearts
of those they love, and the esteem of
such as deserve it.

F I N I S.

The [illegible] of [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

A circular postmark from New York, N.Y., dated Nov 11, 1891. The text "N.Y." is at the top, "NOV 11" is in the center, and "NEW YORK, N.Y." is at the bottom. The postmark is slightly faded and has a textured appearance.



